

- Sampaio, E. V. S. B. 1995. Overview of the Brazilian Caatinga. In Bullock, S. H., Mooney, H. A. & Medina, E. (eds.) *Seasonally dry tropical forests*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Sibley, C. G. & Monroe, B. L. 1990. *Distribution and taxonomy of the birds of the world*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven & London, UK.
- Sick, H. 1985. *Ornitologia brasileira, uma introdução*, vol. 2. Ed. Universidade de Brasília, Brasília.
- Sick, H. 1997. *Ornitologia brasileira*. Ed. Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro.
- Silva, J. M. C. 1995a. Avian inventory of the cerrado region, South America: implications for biological conservation. *Bird Conserv. Intern.* 5: 291–304.
- Silva, J. M. C. 1995b. Birds of the Cerrado Region, South America. *Steenstrupia* 21: 69–92.
- Silva, J. M. C. 1996. Distribution of Amazonian and Atlantic birds in gallery forests of the Cerrado region, South America. *Orn. Neotrop.* 7: 1–18.
- Vasconcelos, M. F., D'Angelo Neto, S. & Rodrigues, M. 2002. A range extension for the Cipo Canastero *Asthenes luizae* and the consequences for its conservation status. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 122: 7–10.
- Warming, E. 1908. *Lagoa Santa*. Imprensa Oficial do Estado de Minas Geraes, Belo Horizonte.
- Willis, E. O. 1985. Behavior and systematics status of the Gray-headed Tanager (*Trichothraupis penicillata*, Emberizidae). *Naturália* 10: 113–145.
- Willis, E. O. & Oniki, Y. 1985. Bird species new for the state of São Paulo, Brazil. *Rev. Brasil. Biol.* 45: 105–108.
- Willis, E. O. & Oniki, Y. 1991. Avifaunal transects across the open zones of northern Minas Gerais, Brazil. *Ararajuba* 2: 41–58.

Address: M. Rodrigues & H. B. Gomes, Laboratório de Ornitologia, Departamento de Zoologia, ICB, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, CP 486, 31270-901, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil, e-mail: ornito@mono.icb.ufmg.br

© British Ornithologists' Club 2004

## The correct name of the Afrotropical mainland subspecies of Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

by M.D. Bruce & R. J. Dowsett

Received 19 May 2003

In a recent account of the barn owl family (Tytonidae) by one of us (Bruce 1999), MDB retained the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* population of Fernando Po (Bioko) as the endemic subspecies *poensis* (Fraser 1843), leaving all other Afrotropical birds (except *thomensis* (Hartlaub 1852) of São Tomé) as *affinis* (Blyth 1862). MDB also pointed out that if *poensis* is not recognised, then it replaces *affinis* because it is the oldest available name. However, several recent and influential works that have not accepted *poensis*, have nevertheless used the name *affinis* for mainland birds (Fry *et al.* 1988, König *et al.* 1999, Borrow & Demey 2001).

It is of interest to note that Blyth, the describer of *affinis*, subsequently wrote: 'S. *affinis*, nobis (Ibis, 1862, p. 388), from South Africa, proves to be S. *poensis*, Fraser' (1866: 251). This interpretation was followed by Gray (1869). In Sharpe's revision of the species and family (1875) he merged a large number of the named

taxa under *Strix flammea* (the old name for *T. alba*) due to the problem of understanding the range of variation, so that African birds were not separated from those of Europe, the Americas and other regions, and this treatment was followed for a time (e.g. Shelley 1896). Hartert (1913) provided the first comprehensive review of barn owls at a subspecific level, separating African birds as *T. a. maculata* (Brehm 1855), described from Sudan. He queried the identity of *poensis* although noting it may be the oldest name for African birds. The name *maculata* proved to be unavailable and Afrotropical birds were separated as *affinis* (Grant 1915).

Hartert continued to query *poensis* because he was still unable to examine any specimens from Fernando Po and retained *affinis* (1929). Bannerman (1933) was also unsure if Fraser's description, in the absence of a specimen, was unequivocally of *T. alba* and used *affinis* (thus also avoiding the vexing problem of dates). Peters (1940) used *affinis* and did not mention *poensis* at all. Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) did, however, believe that Fraser's description was of a barn owl and pointed out its priority over *affinis* if not kept separate, as did Basilio (1963), following Stresemann (in Wolff-Metternich & Stresemann 1956). Eck & Busse (1973) also queried *affinis* as a synonym of *poensis* but in a subsequent review of barn owls *affinis* was retained (Schneider 1977) and the anomaly was overlooked in a supplement (Eck 1995). Pérez del Val *et al.* (1994) merely listed *affinis* as the Fernando Po form, without mentioning *poensis*.

Is *poensis* separable morphologically from mainland birds? Chapin, the first author since Fraser to publish the results of a personal examination of material, thought that *poensis* might be a valid taxon. He believed that two specimens in the American Museum of Natural History [collected by Correia in 1929 (the first obtained from Fernando Po since the type specimen)] show 'more contrast in the vermiculation of crown, back, and wing-coverts than those of the mainland' (1939: 403–404). Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957; see also 1970) accepted Chapin's observations as sufficient to recognise *poensis* as a subspecies endemic to Fernando Po. Basilio (1963), however, acknowledged *poensis* might not be valid although he retained *poensis* as separate from *affinis* following Stresemann (in Wolff-Metternich & Stresemann 1956), who noted *poensis* was similar to *affinis* but smaller (based on feather samples of a single female collected and measured by Wolff-Metternich in 1939). White accepted *poensis* as valid, his wording suggesting he was following Chapin (and Mackworth-Praed & Grant), although he added 'dorsal shaft streaks and ventral spots finer or smaller' (1965: 191), but it is not indicated if he had personally examined any specimens. The type specimen of *poensis* might be expected to be in the Natural History Museum, Tring, but it is not (Bannerman 1933) and apparently it has been missing for a long time (Hartlaub 1857, Sharpe 1876). However, there is a specimen labelled '*poensis*' and registered in 1842, but of uncertain provenance, possibly from the Cape Verde Islands (Sharpe 1875) or the Gulf of Guinea (Moore 2001).

Eisentraut (1973) had a single specimen from Fernando Po, and wrote [translation by N. Bahr]: 'Considering the high variability in tone and pattern, and with

regard to the limited material available from Fernando Poo, it seems almost impossible to me to decide unambiguously if the race *poensis*..... is valid. Amadon (1953), who examined two further specimens collected on the island by Correia, left this question unanswered, too. The male I brought back agrees in colouration and markings with the description Bannerman [1933] gave for mainland *affinis* extensively. When comparing mainland material, especially from Cameroon, at the British Museum, two specimens almost exactly agreed with my island specimen in tone and markings. Therefore I am unable to accept an endemic race from Fernando Poo at the moment.'; de Naurois (1983) agreed.

We believe that Fraser's *Strix poensis*, based on a single specimen, does indeed refer to a *T. alba* obtained on Fernando Po during Fraser's stay from 15 May to 5 July 1842, although it is not clear if he himself collected the specimen (Fraser 1842, 1843, Moore 2001). No-one has provided any firm evidence of differences warranting the separation of *poensis* from mainland birds, and indeed the findings of Eisentraut (1973) certainly suggest there may be none. Consequently, the name *poensis* must be used for the mainland birds as well as those of Fernando Po, and *affinis* therefore becomes a junior synonym. The only important differences of any Afrotropical island population from mainland *T. alba* are to be found in the notably darker plumage and smaller size of *T. a. thomensis*. São Tomé is a long-isolated island of high endemism, unlike Fernando Po. Madagascar is also an area of endemism, but barn owls there must be a late arrival as *T. a. hypermetra* (Grote 1928) was considered to be inseparable from '*affinis*', although on average these populations are larger than mainland birds (cf. Benson 1963, Benson *et al.* 1976). However, recent indications that *hypermetra* may be valid also suggest a need to re-evaluate the taxonomic status of African populations of barn owls, e.g. compare the different treatments in Bruce (1999) and König *et al.* (1999).

#### Acknowledgements

For help in various ways we thank Norbert Bahr and Mrs Amberley Moore.

#### References:

- Amadon, D. 1953. Avian systematics and evolution in the Gulf of Guinea. The J.G. Correia collection. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 100: 393–452.
- Bannerman, D. A. 1933. *The birds of tropical West Africa*, vol. 3. Crown Agents, London.
- Basilio, A. 1963. *Aves de la isla de Fernando Poo*. Ed. Cocalusa, Madrid.
- Benson, C. W. 1963. Notes on some specimens mainly from Aldabra. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 83: 13–15.
- Benson, C. W., Colebrook-Robjent, J. F. R. & Williams, A. 1976. Contribution à l'ornithologie de Madagascar. [2] *L'Oiseau et R.F.O.* 46: 209–242.
- Blyth, E. 1862. [The following notes are extracted from Mr. Blyth's more recent letters]. *Ibis* 4: 387–390.
- Blyth, E. 1866. The ornithology of India. – A Commentary on Dr. Jerdon's 'Birds of India'. [1] *Ibis* (2) 2: 225–258.
- Borrow, N. & Demey, R. 2001. *Birds of western Africa*. Christopher Helm, London, UK.
- Bruce, M. D. 1999. Family Tytonidae (barn-owls). Pp. 34–75 in del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. & Sargatal, J. (eds.) *Handbook of the birds of the world*, vol. 5. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
- Chapin, J. P. 1939. The birds of the Belgian Congo. Part II. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 75: i–vi, 1–632.

- de Naurois, R. 1983. Falconidae, Psittacidae et Strigiformes des îles de São Tomé et Príncipe (Golfe de Guinée). *Bonn. Zool. Beitr.* 34: 429–451.
- Eck, S. 1995. Ergänzungen zur Systematik der Schleiereulen. *Neue Brehm Bücherei* 340: 152–156.
- Eck, S. & Busse, H. 1973. Eulen. Die rezenten und fossilen Formen. Aves, Strigidae. *Neue Brehm-Bücherei* 469: 1–196.
- Eisentraut, M. 1973. Die Wirbeltierfauna von Fernando Poo und Westkamerun. *Bonn. Zool. Monogr.* 3: 1–428.
- Fraser, L. 1842. Letter from Mr. Fraser, Zoologist to the Niger Expedition. *Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist.* 10: 126–127.
- Fraser, L. 1843. [On two new species of birds from Western Africa]. *Proc. Zool. Soc., Lond.* 1842: 189–190.
- Fry, C. H., Keith, S. & Urban, E. K. (eds.) 1988. *The birds of Africa*, vol. 3. Academic Press, London, UK.
- Grant, C. H. B. 1915. On a collection of birds from British East Africa and Uganda, presented to the British Museum by Capt. G.P. Cozens [*sic* = Cosens]. Part II. Accipitriformes-Cypseli. *Ibis* (10) 3: 235–316.
- Gray, G. R. 1869. *Hand-list of genera and species of birds, distinguishing those contained in the British Museum*. Pt 1. Brit. Mus., London.
- Grote, H. 1928. Neue Formen von Ostafrika, Aldabra und Madagaskar. *Orn. Monatsber.* 36: 77–79.
- Hartert, E. 1913. *Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*. Bd. 2. R. Friedländer, Berlin.
- Hartert, E. 1929. On various forms of the genus *Tyto*. *Novit. Zool.* 35: 93–104.
- Hartlaub, G. 1852. Descriptions de quelques nouvelles espèces d'Oiseaux. *Rev. Mag. Zool.* (2) 4: 3–7.
- Hartlaub, G. 1857. *System der Ornithologie Westafrika's*. C. Schünemann, Bremen.
- König, C., Weick, F. & Becking, J.-H. 1999. *Owls. A guide to the owls of the world*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven & London, UK.
- Mackworth-Præd, C. W. & Grant, C. H. B. 1957. On *Strix poensis* Fraser, *Proc. Zool. Soc.*, p. 189, 1842. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 77: 154–155.
- Mackworth-Præd, C. W. & Grant, C. H. B. 1970. *Birds of west central and western Africa*, vol. 1. Longman, London.
- Moore, A. 2001. A commentary on a list of birds collected on the 1841 naval expedition to the Niger River. *Malimbus* 23: 93–109.
- Pérez del Val, J., Fa, J. E., Castroviejo, J. & Purroy, F. J. 1994. Species richness and endemism of birds in Bioko. *Biodiv. & Conserv.* 3: 868–892.
- Peters, J. L. 1940. *Check-list of birds of the world*, vol. 4. Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Schneider, W. 1977. Schleiereulen. Tytonidae. Second edn. *Neue Brehm Bücherei* 340: 1–151.
- Sharpe, R. B. 1875. *Catalogue of the Striges, or nocturnal birds of prey. Catalogue of the birds in the British Museum*, vol. 2. Brit. Mus., London.
- Sharpe, R. B. 1876. On the geographical distribution of Barn-Owls. In Rowley, G. D. (ed.) *Orn. Miscell.* 1: 269–298.
- Shelley, G. E. 1896. *The birds of Africa, comprising all the species which occur in the Ethiopian Region*, vol. 1. R. H. Porter, London, UK.
- White, C. M. N. 1965. *A revised check list of African non-passerine birds*. Government Printer, Lusaka.
- Wolff-Metternich, F. & Stresemann, E. 1956. Biologischen Notizen über Vögel von Fernando Po. *J. Orn.* 97: 274–290.

Addresses: M. D. Bruce, P.O. Box 180, Turramura NSW 2074, Australia, e-mail: mdbuce@ozemail.com.au. R. J. Dowsett, Le Pouget, 30440 Sumène, France, e-mail: Dowsett@aol.com